

## Conservative Brownback Seeks Common Ground

Senator Finds Success in Teamwork With Liberals

By Helen Dewar  
Washington Post Staff Writer  
Monday, June 17, 2002; Page A15

In February, Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.) and Senate Majority Leader Thomas A. Daschle (D-S.D.) were honored by the National Council of La Raza, the nation's largest Latino civil rights group. In May, Brownback joined Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) to pass border security legislation. Now, he's working with moderate Democrat Mary Landrieu of Louisiana, as well as many of the Senate's Republican conservatives, to ban all forms of human cloning.

For now, a clear-cut showdown on the issue -- whether to ban all human embryo cloning or allow it for research but not reproductive purposes -- is in doubt. Facing defeat on a total ban, Brownback opted instead for a two-year moratorium. Then negotiations over procedures for the debate collapsed, forcing Brownback to fall back on a strategy of amending other bills to include all or parts of his proposal.

But the central question remains: Can this Republican senator pull off the same victories in the cause of conservatism that he can when he works on more widely supported initiatives with people like Ted Kennedy?

In his early years in Congress, including two in the House before he came to the Senate in 1997, Brownback was something of an enigma to political observers in Kansas, described by newspapers as difficult to pigeonhole.

Nothing, it seems, has changed.

With his zero rating from the AFL-CIO and 100 percent approval from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the affable but intense 45-year-old Kansan is about as conservative as a senator can get on most issues that conservatives -- especially those on the religious right -- really care about.

He was one of the young "revolutionaries" who came to Washington to shake things up in 1995 and has continued in the same mode since coming to the Senate, fighting against abortion and X-rated entertainment and for tax cuts and smaller government.

But he has also made a point of finding issues that transcend partisan differences and seeking Democrats, often liberals, willing to work with him to put them into law. Many in both parties have entered into joint ventures, but few have had to reach as far across the ideological spectrum to do so.

Brownback has teamed with Kennedy several times, joined Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) to push for women's rights in Afghanistan and worked with Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) to create an African American museum on the Mall. He regards the passage of legislation to curb sex trafficking, which he co-sponsored with Sen. Paul D. Wellstone (D-Minn.), arguably the most liberal member of the Senate, as the major accomplishment of his six years in the Senate.

He worked himself into influential roles from the start, including chairmanship of the Near Eastern and South Asian affairs subcommittee, which became his by default when he joined the Senate Foreign

Relations Committee, which is not every senator's favorite assignment. He worked to give the president authority to ease sanctions on Pakistan, for tougher policy against Saddam Hussein's Iraq and for efforts to combat religious persecution.

As Brownback sees it, there is a common thread to these causes: a "reverence for life" that links issues as seemingly disparate as abortion, immigration, sex trafficking, human rights and human cloning.

"I think every life is sacred and beautiful, whether it's the unborn or whether it's Ted Kennedy and Paul Wellstone," Brownback said during a recent interview. "I really try to reach out and work with anybody and everybody that I can."

One of the reasons he became an advocate of easing immigration restrictions, he said, was that many communities in Kansas, like others in the rural Midwest, were losing so much population that they had to rely on new immigrants for medical and other vital services. More importantly, he said, it also fit his philosophy that "all individuals are sacred, no matter where they are born," he said.

That approach helped him win the award from La Raza, according to Cecilia Muñoz, the group's vice president for policy. "He's a family guy, he believes in hard work and conservative social values, and that's a really good fit with the immigrant community," she said.

Brownback's interest in bioethics goes back to his exposure to animal cloning issues when he was Kansas state agriculture secretary, and it was reinforced as the debate widened to include human embryonic cloning for stem cell research. He disagrees with those who contend that the embryos are not human beings and says the issue is "whether you create life for research" and then destroy it.

Back home in Kansas, the perception of Brownback is a bit more complex than his own picture of himself.

"If you look at his voting record, it's very Republican and very conservative, yet he strives to find issues where he can work with someone else, the more liberal the better," said Burdett Loomis, a political scientist at the University of Kansas. "There's a kind of opportunism there, and I don't say that in a negative way. It's the way things get done."

Loomis recalls that Brownback was regarded as a "Bob Dole kind of Kansas Republican" -- referring to the pragmatic, non-ideological approach of former senator Robert J. Dole -- until Brownback was hammered from the right in running for the GOP nomination for the House in 1994. After that, Loomis said, Brownback held to a more conservative line.

Yet Brownback "is quite ambitious," likes getting things done and likes being liked, Loomis said. "He may disagree with people, but he wants them to like him."